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KARAITE ANTHOLOGY

Excerpts from the Early Literature

TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC, ARAMAIC, AND HEBREW SOURCES

WITH NOTES BY

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extent into occasions of sadness and self-denial rather than of soul-restoring enjoyment of the fruits of God's favor and blessing. Fasting, coarse raiment, and contempt of worldly goods were elevated into virtues per se, and the more one indulged in these tokens of repentance and self-purification, the nearer one came to righteousness and the greater was one's contribution toward the redemption and restoration of Israel.

In many of his innovations and deviations Anan seems to have borrowed his ideas from other sectarians, especially the Essenes and the Yudganites, whose ascetic mode of thinking and living must have found a sympathetic echo in his own mind. Anan's debt to the Sadducee teaching is still a matter of uncertainty and controversy; in any case, the available information on the doctrines of the Sadducees is still so meager and in part so contradictory that it would be rather unfair to pass judgment on the degree of their influence upon Anan and his immediate successors. In some of his doctrines Anan seems to have gone back to old Rabbanite customs which were practiced by Jewish minority groups in talmudic times but were subsequently given up in favor of rites and customs stamped by majority approval and so recorded in the Talmud. Here, too, the evidence is rather scanty and needs further amplification.

A summary of the *Book of Precepts* is occasionally quoted under the Arabic title of *Fadlaka* ("Summary"). It, too, was written in Aramaic, and the title therefore is hardly authentic. Since al-Ḳirḳisānī speaks of "the book of Anan"²²—in the singular—it may well be questioned whether the *Summary* was a separate work.

Al-Ḳirḳisānī states also that Anan was reported in the tenth century to have written a treatise on the transmigration of souls, a doctrine to which he was said to have subscribed and which was accepted by some tenth-century Ananites.²³ Since al-Ḳirḳisānī indicates clearly that he himself did not see the work, the sus-

22. See above, p. 3.

23. *KA*, I, 54, ll. 18–20.

picion arises that the claim may have been a fictitious one, invented by these Ananites to justify their belief in metempsychosis.²⁴

FROM THE BOOK OF PRECEPTS OF ANAN BEN DAVID

I. OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

1. The Merciful One has ordered us to perform His precepts with awe and reverence, as it is written: *Worship ye the Lord with fear* (Ps. 2: 11). Even though this *Worship ye the Lord* refers ostensibly to prayer and requires of man that he should pray before the Merciful One with awe and trembling, yet since the particle *et* has been added here before *the Lord* we must conclude that all other precepts likewise must be performed by us with awe. We must also treat the precepts with reverence, as it is written: *Make his praise glorious* (Ps. 66: 2), meaning, "fulfill ye the Law in a spirit of reverence," i.e., "revere ye its precepts."

2. The Merciful One will sit in judgment over him who makes light of His precepts, as it is written: *Whosoever curses his God shall bear his sin* (Lev. 24: 15). This "cursing" means "making light," because conversely, "making light" is likewise sometimes expressed by the word "cursing"; e.g.: *for the iniquity in that he knew that his sons have made themselves accursed, yet he did not rebuke them* (I Sam. 3: 13).

3. The words *his God* denote God's precepts, for conversely the precepts likewise are sometimes called by the Name of God, as it is written: *Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!* (Isa. 40: 9), meaning that the Merciful One had told the herald of Zion to say unto Israel, "Behold, here are the precepts of your God!" So also *his God* here signifies his God's precepts. As for Scripture

24. Poznanski (*REJ*, XLV, 190–191), takes the existence of this treatise for certain and suggests that al-Ḳirḳisānī's detailed discussion of the doctrine of transmigration of souls (*KA*, III, xvii–xviii) includes material taken from, or based upon, that treatise. All this, in my judgment, is pure conjecture for which no factual evidence is available as yet.

with me, and let us exalt his name together (Ps. 34:4), followed by: *He has not done unto us according to our sins* (Ps. 103:10), *Many things hast thou done, O Lord my God* (Ps. 40:6), *Blessed be the Lord God, God of Israel, who alone performs miracles. And blessed be his glorious name* (Ps. 72:18-19).

4. The reason for the use of these verses is this: since with reference to the Merciful One it is written: *Let them give thanks unto the Lord for his kindness*, the prayer of thanksgiving should include the verse, *For great is thy kindness*; and because he was saved from deadly peril, he must recite the verse dealing with God's kindness and the salvation from danger. After this he must go on to pray before the Merciful One and beg that in His mercy He might teach him the Law, since the revelation of the Law is accounted as a major token of God's kindness. For it is written: *God will send forth his kindness and his truth* (Ps. 57:4)—here *his truth* signifies the Law, as it is written: *that we might turn back from our sins and become proficient in thy truth* (Dan. 9:13).

5. Before men, on the other hand, he must say, *Magnify ye the Lord with me* (Ps. 34:4), because it is written of those who had been saved: *Let them exalt him in the midst of the congregation of the people* (Ps. 107:32); since the former verse continues, *and let us exalt his name together*, it should be recited on this occasion. And since it is written of these same people: *And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving* (Ps. 107:22), he must make confession of his sins, for it is written: *and he shall confess that in which he had sinned* (Lev. 5:5). He must then acknowledge and praise God for His miracles, as it is written: *Let them give thanks to the Lord for his kindness and for his miracles to the children of man* (Ps. 107:8). And since the congregation is required to respond with *amen, and again amen*, they must recite along with him: *let all the earth be filled with his glory; amen, and again amen* (Ps. 72:19).

IV. DIETARY LAW

1. All birds are forbidden to us for use as food, excepting pigeons and turtledoves, since it is written concerning Noah: *And he took*

of every clean beast and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings upon the altar (Gen. 8:20). The clause *and offered burnt offerings upon the altar* indicates that Noah used for burnt offerings only such beasts and fowl as were ritually proper for such a purpose, for if Scripture had merely said "and offered them upon the altar," it would have been sufficient; nevertheless it took pains to make the wording precise, by saying *and offered burnt offerings*, to teach us that Noah employed as burnt offerings only that which was ritually suitable.

2. Now we do not find that any birds were used for burnt offerings save turtledoves and pigeons, as it is written: *And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering be of fowls, let him bring his offering of turtledoves or of young pigeons* (Lev. 1:14). The juxtaposition of the words *of every clean bird* and *he offered burnt offerings* thus proves that the only clean birds are turtledoves and pigeons.

V. SABBATH

1. Carrying a burden, which is forbidden on the Sabbath, signifies only the act of carrying upon one's shoulder, since it is written: *they carried upon their shoulders* (Num. 7:9).

2. [It is forbidden to light fire in Jewish homes on the Sabbath or to permit fire kindled before the arrival of the Sabbath to continue burning into the Sabbath, as it is written: *Ye shall not kindle fire in all your dwellings upon the sabbath day* (Exod. 35:3).]

3. One might perhaps say that it is only the kindling of fire on the Sabbath which is forbidden, and that if the fire had been kindled on the preceding weekday it is to be considered lawful to let it remain over the Sabbath. Now the Merciful One has written here: *Ye shall not kindle fire*, and elsewhere: *thou shalt not perform any work* (Exod. 20:10), and both prohibitions begin with the letter *taw*. In the case of labor, of which it is written: *thou shalt not perform any work*, it is evident that even if the work was begun on a weekday, before the arrival of the Sabbath, it is necessary to desist from it with the arrival of the Sabbath. The same rule must therefore apply also to the kindling of fire, of which it

is written: *Ye shall not kindle*, meaning that even if the fire has been kindled on a weekday, prior to the arrival of the Sabbath, it must be extinguished.

4. In the case of work, just as one is forbidden to perform it himself, so also is he forbidden to have others perform it for him. [So, too, in the case of fire, one is forbidden to make others kindle it for him on the Sabbath, just as one is forbidden to kindle it himself.] Thus it is clear that we are forbidden to leave either a lamp or any other light burning on the Sabbath in any Jewish home.

VI. INCEST

1. It is written: *The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father or the daughter of thy mother, whether born at home or born outside, thou shalt not uncover their nakedness* (Lev. 18: 9). The words *The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father or the daughter of thy mother* mean that a man may not marry his sister, whether she is the daughter of both his father and his mother or only of his father and not his mother or only of his mother and not his father.

2. The words *whether born at home or born outside* signify whether begotten in lawful marriage or by fornication or out of a male or female slave. One born legitimately is designated as *born at home* [referring to the verse: *Thy wife shall be like a fruitful vine by the sides of thy home* (Ps. 128: 3)]. One born illegitimately is called *born outside*, referring to the verse: *Now she is outside, now in the streets, and she lies in ambush at every corner* (Prov. 7: 12).

3. The words *thou shalt not uncover their nakedness* imply that all these are equally forbidden.

4. The words *their nakedness* are in the plural, because Scripture did not wish to say in the singular, "the nakedness of the daughter of thy father and thy mother," or "the nakedness of the daughter of a male slave," or "the nakedness of the daughter of a female slave"; [rather], it says *their nakedness*, in the plural, to tell us that all women who are our full or half sisters are equally for-

bidden to us, whether they are of high or low degree in our estimation.

5. Likewise a woman may not marry her full or half brother, even one begotten by fornication or out of a male or female slave.

VII. DIVORCE

1. It is written: *If a man should take a wife and become her husband, and if it should happen that she should find no favor in his eyes, because he has found in her something hateful* (Deut. 24: 1); i.e., if he found her unworthy in his sight by discovering in her something to make him dislike her, so that he is no longer pleased with her, he may then divorce her, whether because he does not want her or because she does not want him.

2. It is written further: *and he shall write for her a writ of cutting off*, meaning that he is to write for her a deed which makes separation between him and her complete.

3. Scripture calls it *a writ of cutting off*, implying that he must not write it until he is certain that there is no offspring of his within her. If the wife is pregnant, the husband may not write the bill of divorcement for her until the offspring has been delivered. If she is not pregnant, he must withdraw from her for three months, after which he may write the bill. The reason for this is that the presence of a child within a woman becomes certain in three months from the time of conception, as it is written: *And it came to pass, after about three months, that word was brought to Judah, to say, Tamar, thy daughter-in-law, has committed adultery, and behold also, she is with child by fornication* (Gen. 38: 24). This shows us that pregnancy does become recognizable in three months.

4. It is written further: *and he shall place it in her hand, and shall send her away from his house* (Deut. 24: 1), meaning that he must give it to her into her own hand and dismiss her from his home. The words *from his house* indicate that even though he has withdrawn from her prior to the delivery of the writ of divorcement she remains in his house.

5. As for the bill, he writes it for her thus: "I, So-and-so, the son of So-and-so, took So-and-so, the daughter of So-and-so, to be my wife, and I became her husband. And certain things came to pass between me and her, and I have written for her this writ of divorcement, and I have placed it in her hand and have sent her away from my house. And the witnesses of her divorce are So-and-so, the son of So-and-so, and So-and-so, the son of So-and-so."

VIII. CIRCUMCISION

1. A man must be circumcised by another man and may not circumcise himself with his own hand, since Scripture says: *And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin* (Gen. 17: 11). Were the meaning to be that a man may circumcise himself with his own hand, it would have been written, "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin"; the wording *And ye shall be circumcised* indicates therefore that someone else must circumcise him.

2. In dealing with the "foreskin of the heart," where no severing of flesh is involved and whatever is to be done about it rests with the penitent person, Scripture says: *Ye shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart* (Deut. 10: 16), without using the word "flesh" or employing the passive prefix. In speaking, on the other hand, of the actual male foreskin, where severing of the flesh is involved and where another person must perform the circumcision, Scripture uses both the word "flesh" and the passive prefix, as [in the aforementioned verse, and also] in the verse: *And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be exterminated from among his people* (Gen. 17: 14).

BENJAMIN AL-NAHĀWANDĪ

BENJAMIN ben Moses al-Nahāwandī, of Nahāwand (Nihāvend) in Persia (in the ancient province of Media), flourished in the second quarter of the ninth century, and was thus one of the all but immediate successors of Anan. In later Karaite tradition he is regarded as second only to Anan¹ in the hierarchy of the fathers of the Karaite synagogue—an opinion which is too strongly colored by the desire to present early Karaism as a unified and cohesive movement to be credible. Al-Ḳirḳisānī, who lived a century later, states—and we have no reason to disbelieve him—that Benjamin was "learned in the lore of the Rabbanites and strong in Scripture, and served for many years as a judge." He disagreed with many aspects of Anan's teaching,² and later Karaites did not accept all of Benjamin's views. In particular they rejected his theory³ that God had created only one angel and that it was this angel, and not God Himself, who accomplished all the other work of creation.

Of Benjamin's life very little is known. It seems certain, however, that the Karaite settlement in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, began after Benjamin's demise;⁴ hence it would appear that Benjamin did not emigrate to Palestine but spent his life in or near the Karaite centers in Persia and Iraq.

Unlike Anan, who wrote, so far as we know, only in Aramaic, and unlike his own successors, who wrote mostly in Arabic, Ben-

1. In the Karaite memorial prayer (*Karaite Liturgy* [Vienna, 1854], I, 303), Benjamin is listed next to Saul, Anan's son and successor in the office of the Karaite exilarch. To later Mohammedan writers the Karaites were the "followers of Anan and Benjamin" (Arabic *aṣḥāb 'Anān wa-Binyāmīn*; cf. Kobak's *Yēšurun*, IX (1873), 35; Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, VII, 664).

2. A summary of the characteristic points of Benjamin's teaching is given in *KA*, I, 55-56 (English transl., *HUCA*, VII (1930), 386-387).

3. Presumably adapted from the Hellenistic-Christian doctrine of the Creative Word, the so-called *Logos*.

4. Salmon ben Jeroham says so expressly (*LK*, I, 22); there is other evidence to the same effect (cf. Mann, p. 4).